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# **A War for Principle? Shifting Memories of the Union Cause in Iowa, 1865–1916**

## *The Continuing Contest Over Union Memory*

In September 1870 Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, one of the North's leading commanders in the American Civil War, spoke in Des Moines before an enthusiastic throng of Union veterans. The late Civil War, he said, "was not like most wars, a war for conquest and glory. It was a war for principle." That principle, he explained, was "nationality ... Let the people of this Nation cherish this spirit of nationality and devotion to country, and the republic will never be destroyed."<sup>1</sup> It was not long before Sherman began to fear that the defeated Southerners were beginning to challenge the notion that Northern volunteers had fought a righteous war against an unlawful rebellion. When the general returned to Iowa for another soldiers' reunion in the fall of 1875, he urged his former comrades to set down their wartime experiences in print, "for the time is coming and is near at hand when the truth must be told and the truth will vindicate itself."<sup>2</sup> Twelve years later he had begun to doubt that the truth as he saw it would be vindicated. "[T]he Rebels," he wrote, "succeed in their claims to have been the simon pure patriots and 'Union men' of our generation. They have partially succeeded and may completely succeed."<sup>3</sup>

Sherman's fears that Americans would forget the noble purpose of the Union war effort were fully justified. Although he contributed his own memoirs to the truth-telling project so dear to his heart, the great Union cause soon lost its luster in American popular culture.<sup>4</sup> Readers familiar with *Gone With the Wind*, Metro Goldwyn Mayer's sweeping 1939 adaption

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<sup>1</sup> Des Moines *Daily Iowa State Register* (DISR), 9/2/1870.

<sup>2</sup> DISR, 10/1/1875.

<sup>3</sup> W.T. Sherman to S.H.M. Byers, 5/1/1887, Samuel H.M. Byers Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (SHSI).

<sup>4</sup> William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman* (New York, 1875).

of Margaret Mitchell's bestselling novel, will know that Union troops are depicted in that movie only as ruthless invaders of the Old South. By the mid-twentieth century white Southerners' remembrance of the Civil War as a one-sided conflict fought by outnumbered cavaliers to protect a courtly plantation society was the country's dominant memory of its greatest catastrophe. When it came time to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Civil War in 1961, the saviors of the republic had all been mustered out and most Northerners would have found it hard to understand the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass's passionate assertion, made in defense of the Union cause, that there had been "a right side and a wrong side" in the Civil War.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars such as David W. Blight, Nina Silber, and Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary have identified the period between the late 1870s and the early 1900s as a critical juncture in American history when memories of the Union cause waned under the pressure for sectional reconciliation. In doing so they have fashioned a broad-based explanation for why Northern and Southern whites embraced each other (sometimes literally) so soon after the slaughter of at least 750,000 combatants on both sides of the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> Americans' reasons for doing so included a mutual commitment to a dominant discourse of Anglo-Saxon racism and imperialism, a rapidly growing consensus that the ordinary soldiers on both sides had fought courageously for a cause in which they sincerely believed, the shared appeal of romantic depictions of the plantation South, and a solidifying postbellum nationalism which was manifested in strong intersectional support for the republic's imperial ventures.

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<sup>5</sup> Douglass quoted in David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 92. On the consensual origins of the ill-fated centennial see Robert Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961–1965* (Baton Rouge, 2007), 15–50. James Martin, a Wisconsin volunteer, was the last surviving Union veteran in Iowa. He died in September 1949. The last Iowa volunteer died nine months earlier. *Des Moines Register*, 9/21/1949.

<sup>6</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993); Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, 1999). Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), a probing study of the Union cause in wartime, argues (pp.3–4) that the cause's declining salience has blinded historians to its importance to Northerners in the 1860s. For a convincing update on the number of Civil War deaths see J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* 4 (2011), 307–48.

Recently this paradigmatic account of a relatively swift and linear path to sectional reconciliation has been questioned by a growing number of historians including John R. Neff, Robert Hunt, Caroline E. Janney, and M. Keith Harris who contend that white Northerners, especially the aging “boys in blue,” retained their allegiance to the Union cause well into the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Although the persistence of wartime hatreds feature heavily in their analyses, most of these scholars also stress that many Union veterans retained a clear-sighted understanding that slavery had precipitated the rebellion and that its destruction, essential to the defeat of the Confederacy, was an essential part of their achievement. Barbara A. Gannon and Andre Fleche have connected this emancipatory strand of Union memory to anti-racism, arguing that sizable numbers of white veterans retained a respect for their African-American peers which was at odds with the wider society’s view of blacks as uncivilized and dangerous.<sup>8</sup>

This study probes the development of Union memory in Iowa between 1865 and 1916 by focusing on the two main carriers of Civil War memory during this period: the state Republican Party and Union veterans themselves. It places greater weight than most modern scholars on the impact of interparty competition on the construction of Civil War memory in the late nineteenth century and broadly supports the view that Northerners were not as swayed by the sentimental appeal of reconciliation as some historians have suggested. It demonstrates, however, that backing for North-South amity increased among Union veterans and Republican politicians as the Civil War receded further into the past and that the pace of this backing quickened considerably in the 1890s. The essay also confirms that while many Union veterans and their Republican allies did adhere to an emancipatory interpretation of the Union cause,

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<sup>7</sup> John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence, KA, 2005); Robert Hunt, *The Good Men Who Won the War: Army of Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2010); Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2013); M. Keith Harris, *Across the Bloody Chasm: The Culture of Commemoration Among Civil War Veterans* (Baton Rouge, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011); Andre Fleche, “‘Shoulder to Shoulder as Comrades Tried’: Black and White Union Veterans and Civil War Memory,” *Civil War History* 51 (June 2005), 175–201.

their support for African Americans during one of the bleakest periods of domestic race relations was mostly limited and hesitant. Over time white Iowans' profound commitment to American nationalism led them to endorse a version of Civil War memory which prioritized reconciliation with Southern whites over equal justice for African Americans. Yet it is clear that Union veterans did not surrender their conviction that they had fought on the right side of the Civil War. Nor did all of them fail to connect the wartime achievement of emancipation with contemporary struggles for black civil rights.

All scholars of historical memory acknowledge that groups, like individuals, remember the past within social frameworks and that they do so, necessarily, in highly selective ways.<sup>9</sup> The formation of what the pioneering sociologist Maurice Halbwachs termed "collective memory" must be seen, moreover, as the result of an ongoing cultural negotiation involving elites and non-elites within a given society – a negotiation that ultimately tells us more about the present than the past. By highlighting the shifting nature of the victors' memory in Iowa, this study confirms the value of these insights. A once dominant sectional strain of Civil War remembrance – one that populated the American landscape with vast bronze and stone memorials to the Union cause and to those who risked and sacrificed their lives in waging it – eventually lost its grip on the national imagination primarily because it ceased to address the postwar republic's pressing need for consensus.

### *Remembering the Civil War in the Era of Reconstruction, 1865–1878*

There were relatively few hints in the immediate postwar period of Union memory's impending decline. Its drivers in Iowa (as across the country) were two-fold: first, the collective desire (on

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<sup>9</sup> There is a large and growing literature on historical memory. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, eds, *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York, 2011) and Stefan Burger and Bill Niven, eds, *Writing the History of Memory* (London, UK, 2014) are useful introductions to the topic.

the part of bereaved family members, comrades, and the wider community) to remember and to honor those men who had died to save the American republic; and second, the fraught politics of Reconstruction that sustained war-related issues into the late 1860s and 1870s.

Around 75,000 soldiers from Iowa volunteered to defeat the Southern Confederacy, playing a significant role in the Union's steady advance against the rebels west of the Appalachians. Over 3,500 Iowa servicemen were killed or mortally wounded in battle during the war, while around 8,500 perished from disease. Roughly 8,500 were reported as wounded and another 500 died in Confederate prisons.<sup>10</sup> Most of these soldiers were white but Iowa mustered one regiment of black troops. The First Iowa Volunteers (African Descent), later the 60th Regiment of US Colored Infantry, was composed of a minority of free blacks and a majority of fugitive slaves from border states like Missouri. It spent most of the time on garrison duty in or near the disease-infested Union supply base at Helena, Arkansas.<sup>11</sup>

Iowans were determined that the sacrifice of the state's loyal citizen-soldiers should be remembered. Close kin of officers sometimes had the financial means not only to pay for the embalming and return of relatives who had died serving the Union but also to fund substantial funerary monuments carved by local stonemasons. James Redfield was a Federal officer killed at Allatoona Pass, Georgia, in October 1864 and initially buried nearby. His body was brought home in late 1865 by the colonel's nephew, a fellow soldier, and reburied in the cemetery at Redfield in Dallas County. Three years later the officer's grieving widow paid for a fine marble base and pillar to be raised over the grave. The white shaft was draped with the flag of the republic and two crossed swords and it was topped with an American eagle.<sup>12</sup> Another widow,

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<sup>10</sup> Casualty statistics are taken from Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames, 1974), 153–54.

<sup>11</sup> On the enlistment and service of the 60th USCI see Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 196–98; David Brodnax, Sr., “‘Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy’: Iowa’s African American Regiment in the Civil War,” *Annals of Iowa* 66 (2007), 266–92; and Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 114–29.

<sup>12</sup> *Past and Present of Dallas County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1907), 663; *DISR* 12/27/65. The Redfield monument is still standing today shorn, alas, of its carved eagle. My thanks to John Zeller for pointing out inaccuracies in the county history in an email communication of 11/27/2014.

the wife of Gustavus Washburn, an Iowa cavalry officer who died two years after Appomattox, paid for the construction of a masonic column that was wrapped in a tasselled Stars and Stripes attached to a sheathed sword.<sup>13</sup> This monument was carved by Greenland, Lehman & Co., of Des Moines, who may well have manufactured the similar Redfield stone.

As residents of a young farm state, few Iowans could afford to pay for the disinterment and shipment of bodies, let alone for expensive funerary monuments. In a few cases regimental colleagues joined together to help defray costs in honor of the deceased. Brigadier General Samuel A. Rice, a popular officer who was mortally wounded at the battle of Jenkins Ferry in April 1864, was buried several weeks later in his home town of Oskaloosa “amidst [a] vast concourse of people from town and country.”<sup>14</sup> His grave was topped shortly after the war by a 23-foot stone shaft funded by two Iowa regiments.<sup>15</sup>

Iowans built monuments for several reasons. The stones functioned not only as mourning sites for grieving relatives, friends and comrades but as collective tributes from the living to the dead and as a means of communicating lessons of the North’s wartime sacrifice to future generations. Entire communities banded together to build civic monuments dedicated to the memory of the state’s fallen sons, most of whose bodies were interred in Southern soil at the expense of the federal government in new national cemeteries.<sup>16</sup> Although the business of raising memorials to the Union dead peaked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a number of public monuments were built soon after the Civil War. Residents of the small Bay Settlement near Delhi in Delaware County dedicated their marble memorial in

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<sup>13</sup> *DISR*, 1/21/1868; Leonard Brown, *American Patriotism; or Memoirs of “Common Men”* (Des Moines, 1869), 408.

<sup>14</sup> Lurton D. Ingersoll, “Brigadier General Samuel A. Rice, of Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa*, 1st series, 3 (1865), 401.

<sup>15</sup> *Iowa State Register (ISR)*, 12/23/1865.

<sup>16</sup> By the end of February 1866, for example, the bodies of 333 Iowa soldiers had been buried in the new US government cemetery at Helena, 241 at Knoxville and 147 at Andersonville, *ISR*, 2/27/1866. On the massive Union reburial program see Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*, 103–41.

August 1865. An area newspaper proudly noted that it commemorated “the names and heroic deeds of thirteen martyrs to Union and Liberty.”<sup>17</sup>

The impetus for these stone tributes came from local monument associations – small committees that used patriotic appeals to solicit donations from the wider community. Iowa veterans were often powerful voices in these fund-raising campaigns. In March 1867 one former bluecoat urged Dallas County residents to support the building of a soldiers’ monument. “Our boys were among the bravest where all were brave and true,” he wrote. “Let us honor their memory and show that we are grateful for the liberties [for] which they sacrificed their lives.”<sup>18</sup> Although many Iowans responded generously to such appeals, not all of these early commemorative projects were successful. Efforts to construct soldiers’ monuments in Davenport and Henry County, for example, stalled in the late 1860s, possibly because times were hard for many farmers and town-dwellers and possibly, as one writer speculated in April 1870, because peace was already beginning to breed forgetfulness.<sup>19</sup>

Hatreds engendered by four years of civil war and subsequent political conflict over Reconstruction, however, made it difficult for most Iowans to forget the recent bloodletting. Public ceremonies demonstrated the continuation of sectional hostilities during the political contest over how and how quickly the rebel states should be reintegrated into the Union. One toast offered at an Independence Day gathering in Hopkinton in 1866 included “Our Honored Dead – An army of occupation sufficient to hold the South forever.” Another referred to “The overpowered but unconquered Rebels.”<sup>20</sup>

Politics drove Civil War memory in part because widespread violence directed by unrepentant rebels against black and white Unionists demonstrated the need for continued

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<sup>17</sup> *Delaware County Union*, 9/1/1865.

<sup>18</sup> *Dallas Weekly Gazette*, 3/29/1867.

<sup>19</sup> *Mount Pleasant Home Journal*, 4/8/1870. The Davenport monument was not completed and dedicated until July 1881.

<sup>20</sup> *Delaware County Union*, 7/13/66.



Northern vigilance.<sup>21</sup> The majority of Iowa Republicans, confronted by intensive Southern white hostility to congressional policy, were certainly in no mood to embrace North-South reconciliation during Reconstruction.<sup>22</sup> Their party had led the North's successful crusade against the Southern "Slave Power." After 1865 they lauded the party's wartime achievements, warning Northerners that the defeated Confederates still threatened the peace of the reunited nation. They also denigrated the allegedly treasonous wartime role of their Democratic opponents – especially that of the notorious "Copperheads" or pro-peace Democrats who conveniently loomed larger in the ruling party's institutional memory than the contribution made by pro-war Democrats to Union victory.

The state's ruling political elite (many of whose members were former Federal officers) seldom missed an opportunity to appeal to demobilized Union volunteers by placing their party at the heart of the North's victory narrative. Presidential campaigns in the Reconstruction period were fought largely on issues arising out of the war: the sanctity of the Union debt, the civil rights of loyal African Americans, and the citizenship of former Confederates. In these contests Iowa Republicans took every opportunity to brand their local opponents as traitors. "The Dem[ocrati]c is the only party which has ever fired upon the flag," intoned one leading Republican editor in the midst of the 1868 campaign. "Had it never committed any other crime, this one would remain as a never-to-be washed away evil standing in damnation against it."<sup>23</sup> Traducing their political opponents on the basis of their wartime record helped to guarantee that a majority of Union veterans in the state voted, as they had shot, for the party of Lincoln until the day they died.

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<sup>21</sup> Southern violence, much of it orchestrated by former Confederate soldiers, is well documented in histories of Reconstruction. See, for example, Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863–1877* (New York, 1988), 425–44, 549–53, 559–62, and Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, 2014), 79–80, 96–97, 147–50.

<sup>22</sup> On Iowa's postwar Republican Party see especially Robert Cook, *Baptism of Fire: The Republican Party in Iowa, 1838–1878* (Ames, 1994), 159–234.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily State Register*, 8/21/1868.

During the immediate postbellum period, nothing illustrated the close relationship between Iowa-based Union veterans and the state Republican organization more clearly than the latter's support for a grand reunion of veterans in the late summer of 1870. Backed strongly by Governor Samuel Merrill, a Federal officer seriously wounded in the advance on Vicksburg, the Republican-dominated legislature appropriated the princely sum of \$20,000 for this ambitious event.<sup>24</sup> While politicians clearly stood to gain from their sponsorship of the reunion (Merrill was reelected later the same year), public support for the initiative was overwhelming. Historians have linked war-infused nationalism to the dead on both sides but it is important not to forget that the North's citizen-soldiers, able and disabled, who survived the late conflict were also potent repositories of Union memory after Appomattox.<sup>25</sup> The crowded streets of Des Moines testified to ordinary Iowans' determination to honor the living heroes who had saved the Union and there is no reason to suppose that politicians were any less convinced of the debt which the state owed to them.

As many as 30,000 former Union soldiers descended on Des Moines for what one leading newspaper called "the most magnificent pageant the State has ever witnessed."<sup>26</sup> Seemingly endless columns of former Union troops paraded through the city center in their civilian clothes. This remarkable two-day event was noteworthy not only for quadrupling the city's population (the veterans brought with them around 20,000 women and children) but it also saw General William Sherman nearly crushed to death by an excited crowd outside the state capitol.<sup>27</sup> Pickpockets made a small fortune weaving furtively through the ranks of eager spectators while crippled organ grinders in blue (together with curiosities such as an eight-footed pig and a veteran's pet wolf) provided additional entertainment. Disabled soldiers were

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<sup>24</sup> *ISR*, 8/23/1878.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*, 103–78. On the significance of disabled soldiers in the construction of postwar Union memory see Brian Matthew Jordan, "'Living Monuments': Union Veteran Amputees and the Embodied Memory of the Civil War," *Civil War History* 57 (2011), 121–52.

<sup>26</sup> *DISR*, 9/1/1870.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

the objects of particular veneration, for their sacrifice in the national cause was painfully visible. They included Captain C.P. Johnson of the 17th Iowa, bedridden since being shot through the hip and stomach at the battle of Jackson, Mississippi, in July 1863.<sup>28</sup> The impressive parade through town on August 31 included at least a dozen carriages containing maimed soldiers. “These wounded heroes were the the objects of the deepest admiration by all,” noted one reporter, “and the showing of an arm shortened by half by rebel shot or shell, was an eloquence that carried its own glory and story with it.”<sup>29</sup>

Former comrades could be seen everywhere swapping stories of their wartime service. In one moving encounter a battle-hardened veteran of the Atlanta campaign embraced a friend whom he thought had been killed at Resaca. The man, named only as ‘Frank’ in the local newspaper, had actually been wounded, captured by the Confederates and then confined in the dismal rebel prison pen at Andersonville.<sup>30</sup>

Prominent speakers lavished praise on the veterans. The April 1861 levée en masse after the rebels attacked Fort Sumter loomed large as a totem of Union memory, as did the soldiers’ love of the national flag. William W. Belknap of Keokuk, a prominent Iowa commander recently appointed US secretary of war by President Ulysses S. Grant, praised the patriotic civilian “uprising” against secession as well as the courage, resourcefulness and endurance of the private soldier in wartime. Governor Merrill joined his Republican colleague in acknowledging the debt that Iowans owed to the veterans for their valor and suffering in the national cause. The event was a genuinely collective one. Young people were prominent everywhere – not only as dependants of the veterans but also as participants in the formal exercises. Boys and girls, for example, wearing red, white and blue sashes and rosettes, sang

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<sup>28</sup> *DISR*, 9/2/1870.

<sup>29</sup> *DISR*, 9/1/1870.

<sup>30</sup> *DISR*, 9/2/1870. Thirteen thousand Union soldiers died at Andersonville. Benjamin C. Cloyd, *Haunted By Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge, 2010), 11.

“The Glorious Cry of Freedom” (a version of the wartime favorite, “The Battle Cry of Freedom”) watched by General Sherman and the other dignitaries.<sup>31</sup>

Although none of the principal orators heralded the abolition of slavery as a leading accomplishment of the Civil War, African Americans – whose annual commemorations of emancipation were significant transmitters of Civil War memory in postbellum Iowa – were visible during the reunion.<sup>32</sup> One hundred and twenty former US Colored Troops marched in parade and were addressed by white as well as black speakers.<sup>33</sup>

It is impossible to say precisely how many of the mainly white veterans in Des Moines concurred with the two non-radical Republicans, Sherman and Belknap, that Union victory was all about nationhood. For some the emancipation of an entire race was also a major accomplishment of the war. Although the vast majority of Union soldiers had enlisted to save the republic and not to free slaves, many had come to share President Abraham Lincoln’s conviction that the first objective was not possible without the second.<sup>34</sup> Support for abolition did not, by any means, always translate into opposition to racial prejudice in the North. However, many volunteers, even while harboring racist views of African Americans, had come to respect the patriotic loyalty of blacks, enslaved as well as free, and contrasted that loyalty with the treachery of Southern whites and Northern Copperheads. When Iowa Republicans declared in favor of black suffrage in June 1865, they did so primarily to acknowledge African Americans’ support for the Union. Even Governor William M. Stone, a Union officer who did

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<sup>31</sup> *DISR*, 1/9/1870.

<sup>32</sup> On black emancipation events in postwar Iowa see Leslie A. Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations: The Commemoration of Slavery and Freedom in Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa* 62 (2003), 291–332.

<sup>33</sup> *DISR*, 9/2/1870.

<sup>34</sup> Chandra Manning charts what she regards as most white Union troops’ acceptance of emancipation and black troops in *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York, 2007), 81–102, 113–25, 148–57, 182–93. Her contention (*ibid.*, 221) that “astonishing changes took place in many white Union men’s ideas about slavery and eventually, if more fragiley, about racial equality,” may be overstating the war’s impact on soldiers’ views of African Americans. Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 80–81, questions Manning’s methodology and is generally more skeptical about the racial attitudes of ordinary white Union soldiers. His interpretation is broadly in line with that of Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York, 1988), 117–30, but for a more upbeat account see James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, 1997), 117–30.

not belong to the antislavery wing of the state party, publicly defended enfranchising Iowa blacks on this ground. “[W]e could not,” he told an audience in Keokuk, “without the basest ingratitude, turn these men over powerless into the hands of their former rebel masters.”<sup>35</sup>

Among those veterans convinced that white Northerners owed a debt to African Americans and that emancipation was a major component of the veterans’ achievement was Iowa’s celebrated soldier-historian and poet Samuel H.M. Byers. In November 1863 Byers was captured in fierce fighting at Missionary Ridge and taken to an enemy prison camp at Columbia, South Carolina. He dedicated his first book *What I Saw in Dixie* (1868) to Edward Edwards, a slave who helped him escape. “Our chains fell off together,” recorded Byers in the same year white Iowans went to the polls to enfranchise local blacks, “and I would not now ask a privilege or right from my Country that I would not willingly accord to him.”<sup>36</sup> Frank, the Union prisoner of war who swapped stories with his long-lost friend at the Des Moines reunion, also remembered the help he had received from Southern blacks after his release from Andersonville: how “he had no money to get home, the colored people took care of him, remained with them many weeks, taught a little school for the colored folks, raised enough money to to reach the coast, and was sent home from Savannah.”<sup>37</sup> Personal memories of wartime assistance may have contributed to Iowans’ support for black suffrage in the 1868 referendum – an achievement that stoked the Republican narrative of the war as a profoundly moral crusade for the betterment of the nation.<sup>38</sup>

Decoration Day speakers, some of them undoubtedly motivated by recollections of black loyalty to the republic during the war and its violent aftermath, placed significant emphasis on emancipation as a major component of the Union cause. Inaugurated in 1868 by

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<sup>35</sup> *DISR*, 7/12/1865. On Iowa Republicans’ support for black suffrage in 1865 see Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 160–66, and Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 200–15.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel H.M. Byers, *What I Saw in Dixie: or Sixteen Months in Rebel Prisons* (Dansville, NY, 1868), n.p.

<sup>37</sup> *DISR*, 9/2/1870.

<sup>38</sup> On the culmination of the black suffrage crusade in 1868 see Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 192–93, and Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 222–29.

John A. Logan, commander of a new Union veterans' organization entitled the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), as a day for commemorating the sacrifice of Northern soldiers, Decoration Day (or Memorial Day as it soon became known) was initially a relatively modest event in Iowa. Not until the 1880s, partly because the GAR got off to a slow start nationally and in Iowa, did it become institutionalized, a genuinely communal event attracting large numbers of participants in towns and villages across the state.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the first Decoration Day in Des Moines was a well-attended affair. Republican politicians including Governor Merrill and state jurists joined veterans and civilians in a mile-long procession to Woodland Cemetery where the graves of Union soldiers were decorated by young girls "robed in white and artless in innocence, with baskets of flowers." A uniformed squad of armed veterans "baptized in the blood and smoke of war" fired volleys over the sacred plots and a rapt crowd heard Judge George G. Wright, one of Iowa's leading Republicans, say that everyone present could not "but feel more than ever their duty to maintain, protect, and defend "the institutions of the republic." Thanks to the sacrifices of these devoted patriots, said Wright, "we rejoice in a freedom matured, a bond delivered, of freedom to all men."<sup>40</sup> At the close of the speeches Cyrus C. Carpenter, a Union veteran and rising man in the state's Republican Party, read out Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, a paean not only to American democracy but also to the principle, seemingly confirmed by the North's victory, that that precious polity was grounded in the Founders' contention that all men were created equal.<sup>41</sup>

Carpenter, a supporter of black suffrage, returned to Woodland four years later as governor of Iowa. This time he read from Lincoln's famous 1864 letter to the grieving Lydia

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<sup>39</sup> On the origins and early history of Decoration Day see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 65–77. Some of the GAR's initial problems were attributable to its inaugural system of Masonic-style grades which imposed social distinctions on a fraternal and egalitarian veteran community. Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 31–33. McConnell's supposition (*ibid.*, 33) that the organization's problems were also caused by many veterans' desire to forget about the war is not supported by the Iowa-based volunteers' manifest embrace of wartime camaraderie at the well-attended grand reunion in 1870.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *American Patriotism*, 9, 11.

<sup>41</sup> On the eventful career of the Gettysburg Address in American memory see Jared Peatman, *The Long Shadow of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address* (Carbondale, 2013).

Bixby, thanking her for giving her sons to help save the republic. Eschewing mindless triumphalism as befitted his position as one of Iowa's more thoughtful politicians, Carpenter honestly acknowledged the existence of lingering "sorrow" among the people as well as the latter's debt to the Union dead. But at least, he iterated, there were compensations: the Civil War had "emancipated a race" and "lifted and ennobled human nature itself in every lover of the Union."<sup>42</sup>

By the late 1870s the main tenets and rituals of Union memory were all in place. Yet the victors were becoming increasingly anxious about maintaining the fruits of war. Righteous force had reunited the nation, but Southern whites had thrown off Republican rule at home and were vigorously contesting the imposition of black equality under the law. Hardly less troublingly, some elite Confederates (most of them openly supportive of the fight for Southern "redemption") were now fiercely contesting the North's victory narrative which glorified the saviors of the Union and denigrated the South as a nest of traitors.<sup>43</sup> To make matters worse, growing numbers of Northerners, including a minority of liberal Republicans impatient with the corruption of the Grant administration and many more Democrats with political ties to the white South, were advocating sectional reconciliation in part on Southern terms. Loyal Republicans did not oppose reconciliation per se in the late 1870s (President Grant himself had tried to foster it) but, alert to Northern voters' waning interest in Reconstruction, they worried that the issues of the war were being blurred by former Confederates like Alexander H. Stephens who downplayed slavery as a cause of the war, legitimized secession as the defense of constitutional rights, and cast doubt on the moral superiority of the Union cause.<sup>44</sup> Although President Rutherford B. Hayes's policy of returning the South to self-government received

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<sup>42</sup> *DISR*, 5/31/1872.

<sup>43</sup> On the early literary defense of the Lost Cause see especially Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 258–64; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913* (New York, 1987), 47–62; and Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood & Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861–1937* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 39–73.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander H. Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States* (Philadelphia, 1868).

initial support from reform-minded Republicans after its implementation in 1877, a majority of Iowa Republicans soon feared that the president had abandoned the region's Unionists to their fate and surrendered political control of the ex-Confederacy to treasonous Democrats.<sup>45</sup>

Political leaders rapidly mobilized Union memory to raise the alarm. James S. ("Ret") Clarkson, editor of the state's leading newspaper, the *Iowa State Register*, welcomed another large veterans' reunion to Des Moines in September 1878 with the statement that the Civil War "was not a Greek to Greek struggle; it was a contest of Right and Justice, and wrong and oppression."<sup>46</sup> Iowa Supreme Court chief justice, Chester C. Cole, disseminated a similarly uncompromising message to the assembled veterans. Any charity afforded to the ex-Confederates, said Cole, should be limited to the perpetrators of "that causeless and unholy rebellion" and not to the rebellion itself: "That was a crime against good government, against freedom and against humanity, and it deserves not and can never receive either condonation [sic] or forgiveness."<sup>47</sup>

Former governor Samuel J. Kirkwood repeated the refrain the next day in his remarks to a large crowd gathered in Woodland Cemetery to see the dedication of a handsome memorial shaft in memory of Nathaniel Baker. (The late adjutant general's remains had been viewed by nearly 10,000 people when he died three years earlier).<sup>48</sup> All reasonable men, said Kirkwood, wanted sectional antagonism to be healed as quickly as possible. "But," he added:

this sore on the body politic, must be treated somewhat like an ugly sore on the human body; we must guard alike against such treatment as will make the sore permanent, and such treatment as will, by too great haste to work a cure, skin the sore over without curing it, leaving it to break out again. It seems to me the tendency of the times is toward the latter error. ... [S]ome of our people seem to desire to ignore the fact that we have ever had a civil war, or to insist that if it shall be remembered at all it shall be only as an unfortunate and foolish quarrel in which both sides were about equally wrong and neither side especially to blame – that at least each side believed itself to be right and was fighting according to its

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<sup>45</sup> Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 231–33.

<sup>46</sup> *ISR*, 9/4/1878.

<sup>47</sup> *ISR*, 9/6/1878.

<sup>48</sup> *ISR*, 9/16/1876.



convictions, and that no blame should attach to him who has convictions and has the courage to fight for them.<sup>49</sup>

Embedded in this extended medical metaphor was the essence of Union memory: The deep conviction, shared with black leaders like Douglass, that there was indeed a right side and a wrong side in the Civil War and that, romantic hopes for peace notwithstanding, patriotic Iowans had fought and died for the right.

### *Holding the Line: The Union Cause in Transition, 1878–1893*

These pointed warnings against sentiment and forgetfulness revealed that the pressures on Union memory were mounting. The ending of Reconstruction, the emergence of a new generation of Americans born during or after the Civil War, the development of a vast integrated national market, and the yearning of ordinary Northerners for stability at a time of rapid economic change and social turmoil all contributed to the growth of sectional reconciliation between 1877 and the end of the century. During this transitional phase in the history of North-South relations, Iowans showed growing signs of a desire to find a lasting accommodation with their former enemies. Those indications, however, did not signal their willingness to admit that the Union cause was morally equivalent to its Southern variant. In an era marked by fierce interparty competition and the rapid expansion of veterans' organizations, the state's Republican politicians had every reason to maintain their grip on Union memory even though they, like the veterans, were by no means free from the countervailing pressures for sectional reconciliation. Political warfare and veteran-centered commemoration would continue to sustain Union memory in Iowa into the 1890s.

Blue-Grey reunions, beginning in the early 1880s, were among the most striking demonstrations of reconciliation after Appomattox. The first Iowa veterans to participate in one of these events were members of the 1st Iowa Infantry, a politically conservative and

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<sup>49</sup> *ISR*, 9/7/1878.

ethnically plural regiment whose members had volunteered to defend the Union after the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter. The regiment had been bloodied at the battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10, 1861 in which 154 of its 800 members were killed, wounded or missing.<sup>50</sup> In August 1883 a number of the unit's survivors accepted an invitation to attend a reunion with their onetime foes on the old battlefield near Springfield in southwestern Missouri. Pleased to witness the unveiling of a monument to their commander Nathaniel Lyon who had perished in the engagement, they mingled easily with their Southern hosts. One of the Iowans, revelling in the picnic-like atmosphere on the battlefield, spoke with a number of Confederate veterans. "I inquired of the old soldiers that fought us like tigers on that day," "G." told readers of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, "and they say, the thing is over and we are glad that it is. We respect the bravery with which we were fought, and we see that we are largely the gainers under the new order of things." The Iowa veteran added that he had also spoken to a number of local blacks – what he called jokingly "an occasional 'contraband of war.'" Each one insisted that the emancipated race had "no apprehension whatever" about the future.<sup>51</sup>

The veterans' willingness to journey down to Missouri revealed that by the early 1880s many Iowa veterans were keen to revisit – literally and metaphorically – the scenes of their youthful valor. Most were now in their forties or fifties. Time had given them an opportunity to sift their memories, to reflect at length on the most intense period of their lives. As they entered middle age they struggled for a more complete understanding of the war's place in their own personal narrative and of the meaning of the horrors they had witnessed and the hardships they had endured. The Iowans' successful return to Wilson's Creek seems to have convinced them that their former Confederate foes respected their bravery on the battlefield, were ready to admit that the defeated South was better off in 1883 than 1861, and that racial issues –

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<sup>50</sup> William Garrett Piston and Richard W. Hatcher, III, *Wilson's Creek: The Second Battle of the Civil War and the Men Who Fought It* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 338. On the recruitment and composition of the 1st Iowa see *ibid.*, 47–58.

<sup>51</sup> *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 8/14/1883.

specifically the treatment by white Southerners of the freed slaves – need no longer be a barrier to North-South amity. Importantly, however, their journey did not indicate any desire on their part to forget the issues of the war. They were interested enough in emancipation and its aftermath to speak with local blacks and, crucially, they looked for reassurance that the ex-rebels acknowledged the superiority of the Union cause.

Blue-Grey reunions were a relatively rare form of Civil War commemoration in the 1880s and early 1890s. Iowa's war effort was more commonly remembered during this period in numerous articles, memoirs, histories, and poems; in public speeches delivered on Memorial Day and at the funerals of wartime leaders; and at veterans' parades and regimental gatherings. It was also manifested in the preservation of battlefield relics (especially regimental flags) and the construction of civic monuments.

Major Samuel Byers was the leading chronicler of Iowa's contribution to the Northern war effort. His many literary outputs were generated partly by the prosaic need to make a living. After Reconstruction Americans evinced a growing desire to know more about their Civil War. Northern magazines like *Century*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Lippincott's* paid handsomely for wartime memoirs: Byers received \$50 for several of his essays.<sup>52</sup> But the major also shared the concern articulated by his patron and former commander, William Sherman, that Union memory would fade unless the victors recorded their views in print. His most important contribution to the memory of the War of the Rebellion was his history of the state's war effort, *Iowa in War Times*, published in 1888. In it he hailed the Civil War as Iowa's "heroic age" and "the story of brave men." "It is an impressive thought," he wrote, "to realize that a thousand years from now school boys will be taught the story of these men. We owe the future something, we owe it to these men, that, as far as in us lies, the truth as to the heroism of these

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<sup>52</sup> C.C. Buel to Byers, 6/3/1886, Byers Papers; *North American Review* business dept. memorandum, 2/4/1887, *ibid.* On the surge in popularity of Civil War recollections after Reconstruction see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 211–54.

Iowa patriots, and the sacrifices of Iowa at home, shall be preserved.”<sup>53</sup> For Byers, emancipation remained an essential component of the story he intended for transmission down the ages. “It is a happy people,” he wrote, “to whom fate gives the chance to strike a blow for human rights. That people’s history is made.”<sup>54</sup>

The state Republican Party continued to champion Union memory during this period, partly because of the need to retain its bluecoat constituency at a time when its dominance of the state was being contested hotly by a variety of political opponents and partly because the North’s wartime experience remained so central to its own institutional identity. In every national election between 1878 and 1892 Republican leaders repeated the familiar charge that the Democracy was the party of treason. Ret Clarkson’s *State Register* led the way, denouncing the Democrat-controlled Congress elected in 1878 as “the Confederate Congress” and gearing up for the next general election by announcing its determination to stand up to the solid South and “its unrelinquished purposes of evil.”<sup>55</sup> When the Democrats tried to shed their Copperhead image by running former Union general Winfield Scott Hancock for president, Iowa Republicans rolled out local war hero and Democratic turncoat Brigadier General James M. Tuttle to testify that Hancock, the commander who stood firm against Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg, would be controlled by Northern conservatives like George B. McClellan and his ex-Confederate allies. Tuttle contended that while the South was solidly Democrat “through bull dozing and fraud ... it was also solid during the war, and we whipped it then, and we can and will do it again.”<sup>56</sup> Although they withstood the Democrats’ challenge in 1880, Iowa Republicans were shocked by Grover Cleveland’s victory in November 1884. When the new president announced his support for the return of captured rebel flags in US government hands and his opposition to veterans’ pensions, they gorged on Union soldiers’ outrage and hailed

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<sup>53</sup> Samuel H.M. Byers, *Iowa in War Times* (Des Moines, 1888), 6, 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *ISR*, 5/31/1879.

<sup>56</sup> *ISR*, 8/6/1880.

Benjamin Harrison's triumph in 1888 as a rebuke to the Democratic administration's "unpatriotic course ... toward Union soldiers and their dependent wives and children."<sup>57</sup>

Iowa Republicans did not condemn all reconciliatory ventures in the 1880s. Cleveland's victory made it clear that sectional rhetoric and war-related issues alone were no longer enough to win national elections.<sup>58</sup> However, they held the line when the former Confederate president Jefferson Davis died in New Orleans in December 1889. At a moment when newly empowered Southern Democrats, increasingly self-confident after home rule had been restored, were looking for tangible signs that their old enemies were tiring of the bloody shirt, most Republican editors in the state found few positive words for the departed Confederate chieftain. Clarkson's *Register* condemned him as "the embodiment of the domineering rebellious spirit of the old slaveholding aristocracy" and still a confirmed "rebel" at the time of his demise.<sup>59</sup> The *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* described Davis as "chief of the greatest failure of modern times."<sup>60</sup> For the *Cedar Rapids Republican*, he was a traitor who "deserves the unbounded condemnation of all who love their country and have not forgotten what it cost to save the union from dismemberment."<sup>61</sup> Small wonder then that one New Orleans newspaper disparaged the torrent of condemnation from "the cold, icicular territory of Iowa, where the wintry blasts freeze the better impulses of human nature."<sup>62</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* also singled out Iowa Republicans for their harsh verdicts on the Southern president. 'As a south-hater,' it contended, 'the Iowa State Register has had few equals and no superiors ... Brother Clarkson's paper has continued to preach sectionalism as it is understood by the blind tigers of Iowa.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *ISR*, 6/16/1887, 11/8/1888.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley P. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro 1877-1893* (Chicago, 1968), 141.

<sup>59</sup> *ISR*, 12/7/1889.

<sup>60</sup> *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, 12/7/1889.

<sup>61</sup> *Cedar Rapids Daily Republican*, 12/7/1889.

<sup>62</sup> *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, 12/13/1889.

<sup>63</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 12/21/1889.

The *Constitution*'s energetic editor, Henry W. Grady, was a well-known advocate of sectional reconciliation on Southern terms.<sup>64</sup> It is likely that his criticism of Iowa Republicans was calculated to increase the pressure on them by making them sound unreasonable in the changing context of the 1880s. In fact if Grady and other Southern editors had studied the editorials from Iowa more closely, they would have detected the stirrings of reconciliation even among hardened Republicans. Ret Clarkson may not have had much time for Jeff Davis (former US senator George W. Jones of Dubuque, a Democrat who acted as a pallbearer for his old college friend, was one of the few Iowans who did), but his paper's dismissal of the proslavery president as someone who for years had been "only a reminiscence, a relic of a most gigantic rebellion, lagging superfluous upon the stage," hinted at a desire to draw a line under the past and move forward. So did its concluding "hope that ... there may come forth a new South that will strive in honorable rivalry with the North, for the trophies of peace and the triumphs of loyalty and justice and equal rights to all men."<sup>65</sup>

Any shift on the part of Iowa Republicans towards reconciliation, however, would have to be on Northern terms. It could hardly have been otherwise given the intensity of the party's battles with Democrats, prohibitionists, and agrarian radicals whose efforts to appeal to whites on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line gave them a greater stake in sectional reconciliation and the mnemonic changes that were likely to achieve it. Those same political contests highlighted the continuing importance to the state's dominant party of its large soldier constituency. That importance increased during the 1880s as Union veterans organized more effectively as members of a reinvigorated Grand Army of the Republic.

The GAR functioned as the main conduit for Civil War remembrance and the transmission of wartime values to the next generation of Americans throughout the late

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<sup>64</sup> William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill, 2013), 140–42, 151–56.

<sup>65</sup> Jones's sadness on viewing Davis's remains was described in *The Caucasian*, 12/12/89: "My poor friend, my poor friend,' [he exclaimed] and passed on sobbing into the martyr's parlor;" *ISR*, 12/7/1889.

nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> While Iowa's Union veterans did join other fraternities including the Society of the Army of the Tennessee (membership of which was restricted to officers) and regimental reunion groups, the GAR stood head and shoulders above any other Union veterans' organization in terms of its political influence and its capacity to mould Civil War memory. It did not attract a mass membership across the Northern states until the late 1870s when Union veterans began to mobilise seriously in their collective interest. A permanent Iowa department of the GAR had been created by the beginning of 1879. It reached its peak strength 11 years later when the state department counted 435 posts with a total membership of 20,234.<sup>67</sup>

The GAR served multiple purposes. As well as lobbying for federal pensions, a cause backed strongly by Iowa Republicans, it also provided financial resources and physical spaces that enabled Union veterans to take care of their own and to recall their service to the nation. The impulse to remember was a powerful one for the aging soldiers and it grew more potent as time went by. "The mists of fading years are rapidly clouding the recollection of America's Great Rebellion," asserted General Josiah Given, the newly inaugurated commander of Des Moines' Crocker Post in March 1879: "The corrosion of time is working decay in the old fellowships and friendships of the camp and field, and the days of old age ... are fast stealing upon us." Given's remarks were motivated by a concern for present-day problems as well as nostalgia and fraternalism. "In these times of peace and reconciliation," he reflected, "engrossed as we are with the cares of life, we are prone to forget the lessons of the past. Whatever be our individual views as to the course pursued towards our former enemies ... we

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<sup>66</sup> The standard history of the national GAR remains McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, although Gannon, *The Won Cause*, is an important corrective. On the Iowa department see Jacob A. Swisher, *The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Iowa City, 1936).

<sup>67</sup> Swisher, *Iowa Department*, 34, 38.

will all agree that in an extended country like ours ... treason may raise its hydra head at any time or from any quarter.”<sup>68</sup>

Iowa’s GAR members met regularly in local halls. There they conducted business meetings and passed resolutions about federal pensions and other matters. Importantly, they also narrated their experiences of the War of the Rebellion not only to one another but to others beyond their immediate circle. Although these meetings usually began as exclusively male affairs, GAR posts often possessed Women’s Relief Corps (WRC) auxiliaries set up to support veterans and soldiers’ families, many of whom were mired in poverty. Populated by loyal women of all ages and political inclinations, the WRC demonstrated that Union memory was not entirely a male preserve even if the male victors took the lead in constructing it. While GAR and WRC posts held their own separate business meetings, their members liked nothing better than convening at the end of formal business for a convivial “social” in which the veterans and their womenfolk would join in singing much-loved songs of the Sixties like “Home Sweet Home” and “Marching Through Georgia.”<sup>69</sup>

The GAR’s commitment to Civil War remembrance gave its members public visibility, especially (though not exclusively) at Memorial Day gatherings. By the 1880s the involvement of GAR posts helped to render these exercises community-wide events that spanned the generations, even in a Western town like Sioux City that did not possess a critical mass of veterans until after Reconstruction and where wartime commemoration was as much a celebration of regional growth as national patriotism.<sup>70</sup> Businesses in urban places across the state closed as a mark of respect to the Union dead on the last Monday of May each year. Veterans processed with members of civilian groups to local cemeteries where schoolchildren

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<sup>68</sup> *ISR*, 3/21/1879.

<sup>69</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 71, notes that the national WRC claimed 100,000 members by 1890.

<sup>70</sup> Tony Klein, “Memorializing Soldiers or Celebrating Westward Expansion: Civil War Commemoration in Sioux City and Keokuk, 1868–1938,” *Annals of Iowa* 71 (2012), 300–5.



decorated the graves of the fallen with flowers and where patriotic orators dispensed lessons for the living based on their reading of the soldiers' sacrifice.

Most GAR members in Iowa were white but, remarkably given the virulent racism of the age, the national organization adhered to an official policy of racial integration that recognized the support African Americans had rendered the Union. Opposition to blacks joining such posts did exist but, importantly, that opposition was frequently contested. When Des Moines' Crocker Post, one of the largest in the state, tried to bar a black veteran named Robert Bruce, a white member protested and Bruce and two other black veterans were eventually admitted in 1889.<sup>71</sup> All told there were around 40 integrated GAR posts across the state.<sup>72</sup>

In books and articles and at reunions, Memorial Day ceremonies and other Civil War-related events across the state in the late nineteenth century, veterans and non-veterans insisted that Iowans of all ages must remember the old soldiers' patriotic sacrifice for the Union. One orator, H.S. Wilcox, told a large crowd in Des Moines in May 1891 that the republic's citizen-soldiers had made the history of the 1860s "heroic; heroic with their suffering, heroic by their death and heroic by their victory." American children, he added, "clearly and unequivocally shall know that the war for the Union was right, and the war against it irretrievably wrong."<sup>73</sup> Although nation-saving was usually singled out as the primary purpose of the Union war effort, emancipation was frequently woven into these victory narratives. Slavery, the veterans knew, had caused the rebellion. Its destruction helped to save the nation and burnished the Union cause with a luster that eluded most of humanity's brutal wars.

Rev. H.O. Breedon took up the emancipatory theme in May 1889 when he told the assembled veterans of the capital's two GAR posts that he esteemed them for their "willing

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<sup>71</sup> Gannon, *The Won Cause*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Undated newspaper clipping [5/1891], minute book, box 27, Crocker Post #12, Post Records, Iowa Department GAR, SHSI (hereafter CPR).

sacrifice upon the altar of National freedom and National unity,” for writing liberty “on four millions of dark foreheads.”<sup>74</sup> In his 1891 speech H.S. Wilcox pronounced “[t]he very name of slavery a stench” made so “by the sacrifice of these, our sacred dead.” The Union soldiers now buried in the ground, said Wilcox, “knew more about politics than the pastors of the church. They knew that slavery was a horrid crime.”<sup>75</sup>

Partly mythologized white emancipationist interpretations of the Civil War were vital not only to many veterans’ understanding of their wartime service, but also to those Iowa Republican politicians keen to retain the support of African Americans at home and nationally. Early in 1891, the year after congressional Republicans had failed to pass the so-called Lodge Force bill to safeguard black voting rights in the South, Des Moines’ grand opera house hosted an interracial memorial service for Abraham Lincoln sponsored by a modern-day coalition of the loyal that included the GAR, the Colored Republicans Club, and the Young Men’s Republican Club.<sup>76</sup> The nation’s martyred president remained a focal point for Union memory during this period and, significantly, Iowans continued to link his name with the achievement of emancipation. In an implicit condemnation of the South’s Lost Cause narrative, Judge Charles A. Bishop of the Young Men’s Republican Club stated that slavery had played a central role in causing “the war of the rebellion.” While acknowledging honestly that Northerners had not fought initially to free black people, Bishop insisted that the growing conflagration had increased Northerners’ “moral feeling” against slavery. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation (which was read out at the meeting along with the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural) was, he contended, “perhaps ... the most important of all the documents known in history” and emancipation “an act that burned away the greatest shame the nation ever knew.”

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<sup>74</sup> Undated newspaper clipping [5/1889], minute book, box 27, CPR.

<sup>75</sup> Undated newspaper clipping [5/1891], minute book, box 27, CPR.

<sup>76</sup> The Lodge bill passed the House of Representatives with virtually unanimous Republican backing in July 1890 but never made it out of the Senate. Historian Stanley P. Hirshson argued that some powerful Iowa Republicans, Clarkson among them, backed the measure because of election defeats in 1889. Hirshson, *Farewell*, 206.

The speaker then turned his attention to the present-day condition of African Americans. Refuting pervasive negative stereotypes of blacks as work-shy and prone to criminality, Bishop emphasized the progress blacks had made since Appomattox. “In many instances,” he said, “the slave of yesterday has become the man of nation-wide influence of today, while in many thousands of other instances they hold honored places in the intellectual, business and governmental life of our country.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite their relatively strong backing for the state’s small (and generally poor) black community, Iowa’s Union veterans and leading Republican politicians were unable to prevent the rise of Jim Crow and the hideous violence that accompanied it in the 1890s. Ret Clarkson was one of a minority of Iowa Republicans to speak out against racial segregation after the Lodge bill’s defeat. In a speech entitled “The Party of Lincoln, Grant and Blaine” delivered in Louisville, Kentucky, in May 1893, he insisted that his party must stand for “human rights, as the cardinal doctrine of our faith” and condemned the recent exclusion of an African American from an all-white “social political club.” “No republic,” averred Clarkson feelingly, “is stronger in actual liberty than its weakest home.”<sup>78</sup> These were fine words but by this time Southern political strength and a host of new issues that bore no relationship to the Civil War were rendering Union memory increasingly vulnerable to consensual pressures.

### *The Waxing and Waning of the Union Tide in Iowa, 1894–1916*

Union memory crested in Iowa in the 1890s, a tumultuous decade in which the United States was plagued by tremendous social change, widespread labor unrest, and continuing interparty conflict. It was a period too when the republic advanced onto the world stage with its swift military victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and its subsequent occupation of the

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<sup>77</sup> Undated newspaper clipping, [2/1890], minute book, box 27, CPR.

<sup>78</sup> James S. Clarkson, *The Party of Lincoln, Grant and Blaine. Annual Address of James S. Clarkson, President of the National Republican League of the United States ... May 10, 1893* (n.p., [1893]), Box 4, James S. Clarkson Papers, Library of Congress (LC).

Philippine Islands. While these strains and events did not lead Iowans to abandon their belief in the justice of the Union cause, they occasioned important shifts in Union memory that assisted its accommodation with, though not its complete capitulation to, the sentimental narrative of sectional reconciliation. Those shifts were evident not only in the way Iowa Republicans campaigned during the watershed presidential contest of 1896 but also in their veteran constituency's growing readiness to embrace the old rebel foe.

In August 1894, just three months after Coxey's Army of unemployed workers had completed their controversial march to Washington, DC, around 5,000 bluecoats, including a dozen or so surviving members of the all-black 60th USCI, gathered in Des Moines to participate in Flag Day.<sup>79</sup> The ceremony involved the veterans' transferral of the state's regimental flags, many of them preserved with the assistance of local women, from the state armory to the capitol building where they were to be kept for posterity in hermetically sealed glass cases – "patriotic object lessons, not only to the present generation but to our children and children's children down the ages."<sup>80</sup> The observances were poorly organized. Weary veterans, some of them shaded with umbrellas by their daughters, were forced to stand for three hours in the burning sun before they could set off for the capitol. Nevertheless the event was watched by thousands of spectators, many of whom were genuinely moved by a sight that inspired still-powerful emotions of sadness and thanksgiving. A long parade headed by Republican governor Frank D. Jackson and anchored by the flag-bearing veterans moved slowly through a downtown decorated with triumphal arches and Civil War-themed storefronts. When the procession finally reached the capitol Governor Jackson hailed the Civil War as "a war for freedom, a war for the unchaining of millions of human beings," and lauded the veterans for their loyalty to the Stars and Stripes. "The insult to the flag and the people's law," he continued

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<sup>79</sup> *ISR*, 8/11/94. Iowa women, the wife of Governor John H. Gear prominent among them, played a leading role in trying to preserve the state's battle flags not only from decay but also from the veterans' penchant for cutting off pieces of the flags as souvenirs. *ISR*, 12/16/71, 2/25/1881.

<sup>80</sup> *ISR*, 8/11/94.

in an adept demonstration of the contemporary resonance of Civil War memory, “is no greater, made by the red-handed anarchists in placing the torch where it destroys life and property, than it is by the so-called industrial army travelling through the country intimidating and holding up communities for food and shelter.”<sup>81</sup>

This patriotic spectacle did more than contribute to the Republicans’ successes in the 1894 state and congressional elections. Jackson’s rhetorical efforts to harness Union memory in the service of present-day conservative objectives foreshadowed his party’s actions in the presidential election campaign of 1896. In previous contests Republicans regularly tarred their Democratic opponents as wartime traitors. In this tight contest, however, the fusion of Populists and Democrats necessitated a more creative GOP strategy that mixed traditional uses of Civil War memory with a concerted effort to brand class warriors on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line as the new danger to the nation.

In Iowa’s 7th congressional district Congressman John A.T. Hull, a disabled veteran, faced strong challenges to his nomination and election. Clarkson’s *Register* predictably informed readers in early June that nearly all Union veterans were working for Hull’s return to Congress in order to continue the fight for veterans’ rights – or, as the *Register* put it, “to right the wrongs that have been inflicted upon their disabled comrades during the role of the present copperhead, conscript and rebel administration.”<sup>82</sup> The congressman’s campaign managers, including General Sherman’s brother, Hoyt (a Des Moines businessman), issued a circular to veterans entitled “Rally Once Again Comrades.” The document unashamedly urged the district’s wartime heroes to dress their lines “and as of old stand ... shoulder to shoulder, and march in solid column to the ballot box” to return Captain Hull to Congress.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *ISR*, 8/11/1894.

<sup>82</sup> *ISR*, 6/3/1896. Cleveland had been elected for a second, non-consecutive term in November 1892.

<sup>83</sup> *ISR*, 6/6/1896.

Union memory was deployed in an equally familiar manner by the national Republican party when it sponsored a Northern generals' tour of the Midwest to help shore up the veterans' vote and by the region's GOP leadership in using Civil War loyalties to deflect opposition attempts to drive a wedge between debtor states in the West and creditor states in the Northeast. However, as Patrick Kelly has observed, there were signs in this overwrought contest that even the most orthodox Republican leaders were beginning to shift their ground.<sup>84</sup>

The threat to sound money and social stability allegedly posed by the opposition's pro-silver presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, induced pro-business Republicans to target conservative Democrats as potential allies in the campaign. In September a Marshalltown-based railroad manager wrote to Major General Grenville M. Dodge, the state's preeminent living war hero and a powerful Republican in his own right who was heavily involved in the business of Civil War commemoration at the national level. He reported that many Iowa Democrats – those who believed “in paying their honest debts with an honest dollar ... in law and order...[ and] that after the Southern States had been whipped back into the Union, that sectional lines had disappeared and forever” – were “making a heroic fight” for the Republican standard-bearer William McKinley, a former Union officer from Ohio who was amenable to North-South amity.<sup>85</sup>

The possibility of attracting support from these pro-reconciliation Democrats alarmed by their party's fusion with radical Populists induced some Republican leaders to set aside old quarrels. Congressman Frank T. Campbell told an audience at the Iowa state fair that “no discredit” should be heaped on ex-Confederates “for they have all realized the mistake they

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<sup>84</sup> Patrick J. Kelly, “The Election of 1896 and the Restructuring of Civil War Memory,” in Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds, *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 180–212.

<sup>85</sup> L.M. Martin to G.M. Dodge, 9/18/1896, box 11, general correspondence, Grenville M. Dodge Papers, SHSI. Dodge's efforts to solicit veterans' donations for a national Sherman monument after the warrior's death in 1891 revealed the wealth gap separating him from most of the “boys in blue.” “[I]t is almost impossible to get much out of soldiers ...,” he reported, “I had no idea of the condition and poverty that so many of the old veterans of the army were in.” Dodge to F. Hecker, 1/18/1892, Dodge Papers.

made, and the hard lines of cruel war have been nearly obliterated with the lapse of time.”<sup>86</sup> At the same gathering Governor Francis M. Drake referred to “the loyal spirit that enthused Republicans and Democrats in 1861,” adding that he had “nothing to conceal when I speak of the love of patriotism and the love of the nation’s credit.”<sup>87</sup> Even Ret Clarkson’s *Register* was impressed by the carefully orchestrated visit of Confederate veterans to McKinley’s home in October. The paper welcomed the mingling of the Blue and the Grey on distinctly Northern terms and stated,

that the breaking down of party lines in this year’s campaign will more thoroughly unify the American people than any other event since the British troops laid down their arms at Yorktown. We have faced Confederate soldiers in battle array, have met and talked with numbers of them since the war, and we are free to say that we would rather trust that portion of them, in control of the government, who are now standing firmly for the preservation of the National honor and the business safety of all the people, than to trust northern or any other men in control who advocate National dishonor to serve the interests of millionaire silver kings. Confederate soldiers were disloyal to the Nation but they were not dishonest.<sup>88</sup>

The GOP’s harnessing of Union and reconciliatory strains of Civil War memory in 1896 appeared to pay political dividends. Over 55 percent of Iowa voters supported McKinley, their ballots enabling him to crush his dangerous challenger in the Electoral College.

As Clarkson’s campaign editorial revealed, Republican leaders’ growing embrace of sectional reconciliation did not betoken any dilution of their conviction that the Union cause had been right. However, it did require them to tune out uncomfortable realities in their dealings with Southern whites. Congressman John F. Lacey of Oskaloosa is a case in point. In his public addresses during this period Lacey, a former Federal officer, was increasingly prone to complement Unionist orthodoxy with appeals for an end to sectional calumny. He told a Memorial Day crowd in Des Moines in May 1897 that Southern whites now recognized that Union victory was for the best. “The day of peace has fully come,” he gushed, “and no heart to-day in all this throng beats with anything but love for all those who live under our flag.”

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<sup>86</sup> *ISR*, 9/9/1896.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ISR*, 10/11/1896.

Added Lacey, Northerners should not forget the war, “but we should seek to keep alive none of its animosities.”<sup>89</sup>

In the same speech Lacey acknowledged, like “G.” the Iowa veteran at Wilson’s Creek, the importance to many Northern whites of a palatable conclusion of the race question as a prerequisite for reconciliation. On a recent visit to Virginia, he recounted, he had toured several of the old battle sites. Approaching the field at Manassas, his party “had met a large number of negro children on the road in holiday attire going to the ‘breaking up of school.’” There would have been no black school without Union victory, he asserted. These young African Americans “were the living evidences of the changes that were brought about by the fearful journey which the Union troops travelled before the humiliation of Bull Run was atoned for by ‘peace with honor’ at Appomattox.”<sup>90</sup>

It is impossible to say whether, at a time of rising Southern white fury against blacks, Lacey really believed his own rhetoric. While he clearly wanted others to believe it, his private report of another trip to Virginia the following month revealed his understanding that the ex-Confederates were less reconciled to defeat than he claimed in public. After visiting the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington, he told his brother that he had found the school “essentially confederate in its teaching.” He expected the students to grow “more national” over time but confided that it was a sobering experience “to have no flag decorating the hall but that of the state of Virginia and to hear no praise of anything except the deeds of Virginia in the late war.”<sup>91</sup>

The dwindling band of Union veterans in Iowa exhibited the same tendency to suppress, perhaps less wittingly than a well-connected politician like Lacey, their anxieties about the growth of the Lost Cause and the fate of African Americans in the cause of intersectional peace

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<sup>89</sup> Undated newspaper clipping [5/1897], minute book, box 24, CPR.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> J.F. Lacey to W. Lacey, 6/27/1897, vol. 228, John F. Lacey Papers, SHSI.



and national greatness. This tendency was aided by several factors, not just the reassurances of Republican leaders but also the old soldiers' own sense that they dwelt in an age of anarchists, socialists and, as one of them put it, "grasping, money-grubbing, bloodless ingrates."<sup>92</sup> While this conviction led many of them to conclude that they had more in common with their former foes than they had with many contemporary Northerners, widespread Southern support for the Spanish-American War provided them with what looked to be incontestable evidence that the old rebels were now loyal to the republic. Des Moines' Crocker Post sent congratulations to ex-Confederate general Fitzhugh Lee for his patriotic course as US consul in Havana.<sup>93</sup> It held its first "smoker" with a group of visiting "johnnies" four years later.<sup>94</sup>

Southern whites' backing for a conflict that signaled the republic's emergence as a Great Power appeared to put the seal on the Union veterans' sacrifices. Those men had fought to save the United States, destroyed slavery, and now their former enemies publicly admitted their fealty to the nation. This development enabled the majority of them to endorse reconciliation while still upholding the cause for which they had fought. One mark of this shift was the bluecoats' declining resistance to the return of Confederate flags in federal hands. In 1887 Union veterans on the streets of Des Moines denounced President Grover Cleveland's support for the return of US government-held Confederate battle flags as "the most serious menace that has ever threatened our republican form of government."<sup>95</sup> In 1905, however, the *Des Moines Register and Leader* noted the muted reaction to Congress's recent decision to return to the states Union and Confederate battle flags in its possession.<sup>96</sup>

Determined that future generations should remember what they and their deceased comrades had suffered and achieved on behalf of the country, Iowa's Union veterans continued

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<sup>92</sup> Cyrus C. Carpenter, "The Charge on Battery Robinet," *Annals of Iowa*, I (1893), 221.

<sup>93</sup> J.A. Pleasants to J.J. Stuckey, 4/30/1898, minute book, box 24, CPR.

<sup>94</sup> Undated newspaper clipping [9/1902], minute book, *ibid*.

<sup>95</sup> *ISR*, 6/16/1887.

<sup>96</sup> *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 3/5/1905.

to commemorate their patriotic service into the twentieth century. Still dominated by the Republican Party, the state government provided substantial funds for the physical memorialization of the Union cause. The most impressive of these monuments – the soaring Soldiers’ and Sailors’ monument in Des Moines and the imposing Iowa memorials constructed on several nationally-owned Civil War sites in the South – could not have been built without the financial assistance of the state. While the original impetus for the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ monument (dedicated in 1894) came partly from loyal Iowa women concerned, like Sherman and other Union soldiers, about the growth of the Lost Cause, it would not have taken the form it did without a generous appropriation of \$150,000 from the general assembly.<sup>97</sup> The appropriations for the state’s monuments in the South totalled nearly a quarter of a million dollars.<sup>98</sup>

In November 1906 the state’s progressive Republican governor Albert B. Cummins escorted a large party of Iowans, numerous veterans among it, on a high-profile railroad journey into the heart of the old Confederacy where they dedicated state-funded memorials at Vicksburg, Andersonville, Chattanooga and Shiloh.<sup>99</sup> Cummins took care to cultivate good relations with the old soldiers. By the time he embarked on this tour, he could be confident that they would not resent him glad-handing Southern dignitaries and endorsing North-South amity.

Many speeches were made on this journey of commemoration and reconciliation. The Iowa delegates lauded the state’s citizen-soldiers for risking and in many cases surrendering

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<sup>97</sup> Cora Chaplin Weed, *Hand Book for Iowa Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument* (repr. Iowa City, 1994), v; Louise R. Noun, “The Iowa Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument,” *Palimpsest* 67 (1986), 80–93. The Iowa Women’s Monument Association issued a public call for a state Civil War monument in May 1891. The group observed that “This duty is not less imperative ... because the people of the South are mistakenly doing honor to treason in the erection of memorials .... Those people and especially the women of that section are yearly setting up false shrines, and pilgrimages are made to them which tend to weaken the ties that bind the Nation. Shall it be said that we who are right have less devotion to our principles than those who are wrong to theirs?” *ISR*, 5/24/1891.

<sup>98</sup> Alonzo Abernethy, *Dedication of Monuments Erected By the State of Iowa: Commemorating the Death, Suffering, and Valor of Her Soldiers on the Battlefields of Vicksburg, Lookout Mountain, Missionary Ridge, Shiloh, and in the Confederate Prison at Andersonville* (Des Moines, 1908), 17.

<sup>99</sup> The trip itself cost the taxpayer over \$8,000. W.B. Bell to A.B. Cummins, 12/31/1906, box 32, Albert B. Cummins Papers, SHSI. For a full account of the event see William C. Lowe, “A Grand and Patriotic Pilgrimage’: The Iowa Civil War Monuments Dedication Tour of 1906,” *Annals of Iowa* 69 (2010), 1–50.

their lives to save not only the republic but also the South. Union victory, they contended, had set both on the road to a greater future. The veterans among them recalled their experiences in battle. “[I]t seems like a dream,” one recounted, “yet terrible.”<sup>100</sup> Several paid tribute to the courage of the Iowans’ onetime Confederate foes, now happily redefined as fellow Americans, but none dissented from Captain J.A. Brewer’s assertion at Andersonville that the state’s Union dead had “died in behalf of a holy cause.”<sup>101</sup> Although a handful of speakers singled out the destruction of slavery as a desirable outcome of the war for the nation, only Colonel Alonzo Abernethy, a veteran of the 9th Iowa, condemned racial oppression and only then in the broadest terms. The war, he said at Chattanooga, “taught that a free people cannot permit any part or class of their number to suffer oppression or wrong. It was a costly lesson, but it had to be learned; and America, both north and south, and all humanity, are the better for its learning.”<sup>102</sup>

One Iowan did dwell at length on the politically inconvenient subject of race. This was General James B. Weaver of Ottumwa, a nationally prominent Iowa veteran who had stood as Populist candidate for president in 1892 and who had long been a vocal advocate of sectional reconciliation.<sup>103</sup> Revisiting the now peaceful battlefield at Shiloh, Tennessee, for the first time since he had fought there in April 1862, Weaver challenged Mississippi governor James K. Vardaman’s recent declaration that blacks were inferior to whites. He did so not to call for the enforcement of equal rights but to urge African Americans to leave the United States voluntarily. The federal government, he said, had “liberated them and set them adrift without chart or compass. It must now promote their exodus.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Abernethy, *Dedication*, 210.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>103</sup> On Weaver’s postwar political career see Mark A. Lause, *The Civil War’s Last Campaign: James Baird Weaver, the Greenback-Labor Party and the Politics of Race & Section* (Lanham, MD, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Abernethy, *Dedication*, 269, 276.

It is tempting to see Weaver's backing for Abraham Lincoln's policy of colonization as evidence for the view of some scholars that Northerners' growing appetite for reconciliation contributed to the marginalization of blacks and the emancipationist strain of Civil War memory. We should be wary, however, of jumping to such simplistic conclusions. Weaver was a political maverick. He had left the Republican Party in the 1870s to support farmers' insurgencies whose potency depended on the creation of intersectional coalitions. His public support at Shiloh for colonization, moreover, was controversial and contested at home. Clarkson's *Register and Leader* printed strong condemnation from a local white journalist, Leonard Brown, who charged Weaver with canvassing for Southern votes ahead of the 1908 presidential election. It also contained vigorous criticism from S. Joe Brown, a black Des Moines lawyer who reminded Iowans that Colored Troops had helped to save the Union. African Americans, asserted Brown, had no intention of being shipped off to Africa to be brutalized by European imperialists: "We are not Africans, but Americans."<sup>105</sup> At least one white Union veteran was also alarmed by Weaver's performance. George W. Crosley insisted privately that he and his comrades had done their "whole duty at Shiloh and on other battlefields to get the solution of the race problem *started right*; it remains for our posterity to determine the solution along the lines of eternal justice and it will be correctly solved along those lines."<sup>106</sup>

Although large numbers of Union veterans regarded the destruction of slavery as an integral part of their patriotic achievement, relatively few of them followed through on this conviction to try and improve the lot of African Americans in the white supremacist climate of the early twentieth century. But some did. In 1916 members of Des Moines' Crocker Post voted unanimously to ask city authorities to ban a scheduled showing of a new "photo-play" entitled *The Birth of a Nation*. As well as condemning D.W. Griffith's pathbreaking fusion of Lost

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<sup>105</sup> *Register and Leader*, 11/26/1906.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Lowe, "Grand and Patriotic Pilgrimage," 44.

Cause and reconciliatory strains of Civil War memory for what they called its “exaltation and vindication of secession” and denigration of the North “for waging war for the suppression of the rebellion of 1861,” they also laid into the virulently racist movie on the grounds that it “insults and dishonors the colored race ... a race who are just emerging by their own efforts from the slough of ignorant bondage unto the light of education and intelligence and manhood.”<sup>107</sup> The protest highlighted the persistence of the emancipatory strand of Union memory. More than half a century after Appomattox some proud survivors of the War of the Rebellion in Iowa were still prepared to draw lines in the sand that proslavery Confederates and their modern-day sympathizers should not be allowed to cross.

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As the United States became an international force it became increasingly difficult to distinguish Union memory from a strident consensual nationalism that served many different purposes, not least the Americanization of foreign immigrants.<sup>108</sup> When it came to transmitting their narrative of the war to future generations, the veterans’ dominant message was certainly unswerving fidelity to the United States. (GAR members in Iowa and beyond devoted a significant amount of time and resources in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century supplying local high schools with national flags and telling schoolchildren about the central lesson – allegiance to the United States – they should take from their wartime sacrifice.)<sup>109</sup> But memories of the Union cause did not fade completely. They remained embedded not only in

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<sup>107</sup> Minute of meeting, 3/4/1916, minute book, box 25, CPR.

<sup>108</sup> On this theme see especially O’Leary, *To Die For*, 172–93.

<sup>109</sup> Iowa veterans gave Old Glory to local schools as part of the national GAR’s Americanization efforts. On February 21, 1896, for example, Crocker Post members presented a large flag to North Des Moines High School. The flag cost \$7.50 with the money being raised by ‘voluntary contributions.’ Minute of meeting, 3/7/1896, minute book, box 24, CPR; O’Leary, *To Die For*, 179–80.

the opposition of some Iowa veterans to *The Birth of a Nation*, but also in the troubled recollections of Union prisoners of war like former Iowa cavalryman Wesley Templeton who found it impossible to forget “the horrors of human misery” he encountered while a prisoner at Andersonville.<sup>110</sup> It was transmitted to future generations by men such as Asa Turner, an Iowan who officered a black regiment during the Civil War. Turner lectured in “glowing” terms in Des Moines in May 1911 on the service of US Colored Troops.<sup>111</sup> Overshadowed though it was in the first half of the twentieth century by that lilywhite strain of reconciliatory memory described by David Blight and other scholars, it enjoyed something of a revival during the 1960s when, galvanized by the actions of the modern civil rights movement, white liberals like historian Allan Nevins and US Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois drew on it to promote passage of a comprehensive civil rights bill.<sup>112</sup> It is a strain of memory and myth-making that merits close analysis, not least for its tendency to elevate Northerners’ sense of superiority over Southerners (the novelist Robert Penn Warren scathingly called it the North’s “Treasury of Virtue”) and its capacity (evident in justifications of the Spanish-American War as a crusade to liberate oppressed Cubans) to bolster American imperialism.<sup>113</sup> Most Iowans who lived through the Civil War, however, would have been puzzled, if not angered, by such criticism. Ret Clarkson had originally planned to begin his Louisville address in 1893 with a rousing affirmation of the Union cause: “It has been a generation of courage and conscience, and sacrifice, and final victory, and growth of liberty and the betterment of mankind. It has been the generation of the Union Soldier, whose memory and example will defend hereafter the

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<sup>110</sup> Wesley Templeton, unpublished reminiscences, folder on “Accounts of Service,” box 1, Wesley G.L. Templeton Papers, SHSI. The memories of POWs on both sides were always a potent obstacle to sectional reconciliation. See Cloyd, *Haunted By Atrocity*.

<sup>111</sup> *Register and Leader*, 5/26/1911. Turner’s public lecture was delivered before the Cosmopolitan Literary Association at the city’s Colored YMCA.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Cook, “Ordeal of the Union: Allan Nevins, the Civil War Centennial, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1960s,” in Iwan W. Morgan and Philip John Davies, eds, *Reconfiguring the Union: Civil War Transformations* (New York, 2013), 192.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York, 1961), 53; Abernethy, *Dedication*, 250; Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York, 2009), 207–8; Hunt, *The Good Men*, 126.

Republic that his valor and his patriotism saved more faithfully and more sufficiently than standing armies, or multiplied navies could defend it.”<sup>114</sup> Iowa’s silent Civil War sepulchers and monuments may have lost the power to move us, but there remains something about them yet that commands our attention.

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<sup>114</sup> Clarkson, typescript draft of Louisville speech [1893], box 4, Clarkson Papers, LC.